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[Navy Medicine is Prepared to Care for Women at Sea](#)

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By Lt. Hope Nicole Blythe Moore, General Medical Officer, Surface Warfare Medical Institute

At the Surface Warfare Medical Institute (SWMI) in San Diego, California, we do our part to help Navy Medicine increase awareness of preventable health problems and encourage early detection and treatment of disease among our female Sailors serving on Navy ships. Female Sailors underway or in port can get this advice or early treatment from their ship's surface independent duty corpsman (IDC) or surface medical officer.



Lt. Hope Moore, a Surface Warfare Medical Officer and instructor at the Surface Warfare Medical Institute, discusses the use of Intrauterine Device (IUD) with a patient. (Photo by Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Jaime Zamora)

Women make up at least 17 percent of today's Navy and Marine Corps team, making their health essential to force readiness. This also makes women's health a critical readiness component of any shipboard medical department. At SWMI, we make it our business to ensure our shipboard female Sailors are fit and ready to deploy so they can do their important work of keeping our sea lanes free lanes. We do this in large part by training and preparing Surface IDCs and Surface Medical Officers to serve on ships at sea.

Navy Medicine treats and prevents women's health issues around the world using innovative technology and research. This includes our ships at sea. The Fleet ensures that its ships are equipped to support basic women's health needs. While the depth of resources depends on the size and mission of each ship, all are equipped with emergency and routine birth control options, basic testing for sexually transmitted infections, equipment for well-woman exams and sick call examinations, and most importantly a professionally trained medical provider.

Our IDC students are professionally trained in women's health exams and counseling and are tested on these skills through multiple patient-simulated scenarios to ensure they are best prepared to provide superior medical care to our women in the fleet. Just as important, these shipboard healthcare providers know when certain health issues may require a higher level of care, and are trained to get those women who need a higher level of care to the right facility as soon as possible.

Navy Medicine encourages women to be proactive instead of reactive in screening for and preventing health issues. At SWMI, we know that many of the health issues women face are preventable and treatable. We also understand that all Sailors, male or female, might be reluctant to ask for help and resources. We counter this by teaching our Surface IDCs to provide women's health education services in basic feminine care and the frequency and need for preventative exams such as PAP smears or mammograms.



Lt. Hope Moore, a Surface Warfare Medical Officer and instructor at the Surface Warfare Medical Institute, discusses breast anatomy with a patient. (Photo by Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Jaime Zamora)

Sexual Assault is another area where our surface IDCs and surface medical officers are prepared to provide support and ensure proper care. In the event of a sexual assault, each surface force medical department follows strict protocols. All IDCs on small Navy ships have the contact information of a certified sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE) provider. These specialized exams are available only onboard aircraft carriers, large deck amphibious ships (LHD/LHA) and shore based hospitals.

Providing women's health care can be challenging in the fleet, particularly in a deployed environment where external resources are often not available. SWMI ensures our IDCs and other medical providers have been well trained to handle the vast majority of women's health issues.

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If you must identify the incredible dynamics of Navy medicine by gender, try to remember the women serving with the Fleet Marine Force as well. Navy independent duty Corpsmen, and other women, are also mission essential and integral to combat effectiveness of Marines far removed from the deck plates of the surface fleet – and often at great personal peril.

Navy Medicine Video